



SÉLECTION OFFICIELLE  
**UN CERTAIN REGARD**  
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

# THE STUDENT

A KIRILL SEREBRENNIKOV FILM



«Those who follow the light have only ever invented darkness.»  
*Robert Desnos*



## SYNOPSIS

Veniamin, a teenager in the midst of a mystical crisis, has his mother, schoolmates and entire high school turned upside down by his questions.

- Can girls go to their swimming classes in bikinis?
- Does sex education have a place in school?
- Should the theory of evolution be taught as part of the Natural Sciences?

The adults are soon overwhelmed by the certitudes of the youngster who swears only by Scripture.

No one but Elena, his biology teacher, will alone challenge him on his own ground.





## **INTERVIEW with Kirill Serebrennikov**

### **Do you see Religion as some kind of addiction?**

I practice Buddhism. It is not a religion. It is not about believing in God but rather how about reflecting on your connection with human beings with the world. Buddhism is down to earth. I am against all forms of obscurantism, against those who tell you what to think. I ask myself numerous questions about the world, the universe, people around me. Religion gives answers. Art consists in asking questions.

*The film shows that religion is a form of manipulation, used by a young man to manipulate those around him.*

### **Is Religion a way for him (Veniamin) to overcome the fear that sexuality triggers in him?**

Fear, frustration also. It is always the darkest part of the unconscious that makes one search for ways to survive their frustrations. The young protagonist of the film has found religion. In Russia, religion is everywhere. Just like in the United States, preachers have taken over television. Religion has become the second official ideology. It controls everyone's minds. It is a hazy dogma, which spreads obscurantism. Russians prefer having a leader to follow,

rather than thinking for themselves. Even though Church is separated from State, the Orthodox religion takes actions on all levels of society: army, institutions, culture and especially education. It dictates what is good or bad and it follows the official ideology.

*Our protagonist discovers that fanaticism is empowering. Nobody will dare to oppose him except for a teacher, who is an atheist.*

### **The action takes place in an unknown city ...**

It is Kaliningrad. Before World War II, it was called Königsberg. It was a German city. This is where Emmanuel Kant was born and buried. It is now a Russian enclave in Europe, between Poland and Lithuania; a strange town which bears marks of its past, like a sort of palimpsest.

### **How did you choose your actors?**

All of the adults are stars in Russia. Both teens already had experience in theater. The one who plays Veniamin's friend had already played this role in my troupe, on stage.



**In your staging, you favor long sequence shots.**

That's because I'm lazy! I can't be bothered to make shots-reverse-shots. I rather rehearse a scene for three days, this way when we shoot it, we only need three or four takes and it's in the box...

**Tell us about the original play by Marius von Mayenburg.**

He told me he wrote this play after reading the Bible and discovering some very strange sentences, very violent ones which had an unexpected double meaning. He felt that, out of context, those sentences could describe the opposite of love and fraternity. So he decided to list these ambiguous sentences. Thus the play was born: based on the idea that it was easy to twist the meaning of the Scriptures.

**Those sentences, you always give their origin ...**

In the play, like in the film, the source text is indicated. The public ought to know that these sentences are authentic. They do not come out of my imagination. I catalogued them all. However, I changed several elements in order to make the theatrical adaptation.

For example, in the play, the school's principal is a man. In Russia, it is usually women. I also invented more teachers than there were in the play. The Catholic priest became Orthodox and I strengthened his role. The texts he quotes originate from obscure Orthodox books but they are real. And I added music. The one which opens what I consider to be the third act of the film is composed by Laibach, a band easily found on Shazam, but forbidden Russian radio. The cause of this censorship: it is regarded as very aggressive and may give rise to bad thoughts...





## Kirill Serebrennikov

Born in 1969 in Russia, Rostov-on-Don. Russian theater, television and film director, he is the Artistic Director of the Gogol Center since 2012.

He staged his first play when he was still a student. In 1992, he graduated from Rostov State University physics department with honors.

In 2008, he formed an experimental actor-director class at the Moscow Art Theatre School. In 2012, the class becomes the Studio Seven, which is now a Gogol Center full-time resident.

From 2011 to 2014, Kirill was the Artistic Director of the Platform project at the Winzavod Centre for Contemporary Art and he currently lives in Moscow.

In 2015, the Gogol Center represented at the Avignon Festival the play «The Idiots», staged by Kirill Serebrennikov. Inspired by the eponymous Lars Von Trier. This year he will present «Dead Souls» inspired by the novel Nikolai Gogol.

### Filmography

**THE STUDENT** (2016)

**BETRAYAL** (2012)

*In competition at Venice Film Festival*

**YURIEV DEN** (2008)

**PLAYING THE VICTIM** (2006)

*Grand Prix at Rome Film Festival*





*Based on the play «Martyr» by Marius von Mayenburg.*

<b>Director</b>	Kirill Serebrennikov		
<b>DoP</b>	Vladislav Opelyants		
<b>Costume Designer</b>	Tatiana Dolmatovskaya		
<b>Make-up Artist</b>	Igor Boyko	Petr Skvortsov	(Veniamin)
<b>Production Designer</b>	Ekaterina Scheglova	Victoria Isakova	(Elena Lvovna)
<b>Editing</b>	Yury Karikh	Svetlana Bragarnik	(Headmistress)
<b>Original Music</b>	Ilya Demutsky	Anton Vasiliev	(P.E. Teacher)
<b>Sound</b>	Boris Voyt	Julia Aug	(Veniamin's Mother)
<b>Producers</b>	Ilya Stewart	Aleksandra Revenko	(Lidia)
	Diana Safarova	Aleksandr Gorchilin	(Grigoriy)
	Yury Kozyrev	Nikolai Roschin	(Othodox Culture Teacher)
<b>Executive Producers</b>	Murad Osmann		
	Cosimo Fini		
<b>Co-Producers</b>	Sergey Shtern		
	Svetlana Ustinova		
	Ilya Dzhincharadze		
	Katerina Komolova		

**HD/DCP - 2016 - RUSSIA - 118MIN - DRAMA**

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